

GREEK FIRE

GREEK PROTESTS BOOM AS THE ECONOMY BUSTS....

Greece has once again been rocked by protests, strikes and civil unrest. This time in response to a series of swinging government cutbacks aimed at bringing the country into line with neo-liberal dogma and reducing its budget deficit. In response to proposed attacks on workers' rights and pensions, virtually the entire country came out on strike on Wednesday. 30,000 marched through Athens and violently clashed with police. There is widespread anger at the governments attempts to deal with the economic crisis by dipping into the pockets of the poor. Marchers in Athens shouted, "No sacrifices! Make the rich pay for the crisis!"

This is the second national strike to hit Greece in two weeks. The first, by public sector workers (almost 1 in 5 Greeks fall into this category), grounded flights and shut many state schools and offices. The second general strike was far broader, all flights to and from Greece were cancelled and public transport ground to a near-standstill, with most trains and ferries standing idle. Schools, tax offices and council buildings remained closed. One group of metal-workers in Athens, satisfied that the strike at their own plant was rock-solid, went and blockaded their bosses' workplace and physically ejected them.

Europe's four poorest countries, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Greece, are all facing similar programs designed to restore stability to the Euro. All are being forcefully encouraged by the EU big boys, with IMF backing, to introduce neo-liberal Thatcherite reforms, such as privatisation, raising of the pensionable age and cutting of public services. If Greece wants to stay in the Euro then it has to cut its budget deficit from 12.7% to 3%. These cuts will come at the expense of society's most marginalised.

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For using the wrong hankerchief...

One migrant solidarity activist found himself on the wrong side of France's riot cops, the CRS, last week during the eviction of the hangar (see SchNEWS 709) - for blowing his nose on the country's flag.

After being released from the cop-shop the activists were escorted back to the hangar to collect their belongings. Overcome with emotion our friend reached for the French flag to dry his eyes and blow his nose. Ignoring all cries of "Liberté, égalité, fraternité", les flics dragged him off and charged him with 'outraging the flag'. He's on trial on 22nd April and will be entering a snot guilty plea.

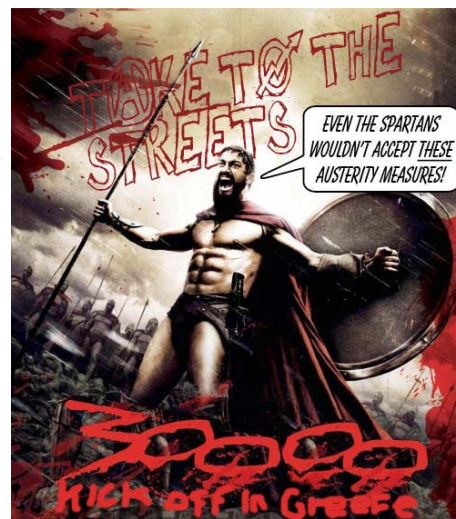
The Greek government is headed up by the centre-left party PASOK. They came to power after the previous government was forced out of office during the wave of social unrest precipitated by the shooting of Alexis Grigoropoulos (see SchNEWS 659). Although Alex's shooting sparked the rioting, it was fuelled by the economic downturn and the squeeze on Greece's workers. PASOK's bid for power was based on promises it couldn't keep - to win the election they promised no wage freezes and a guaranteed pension. Previously, a government in their situation might just try and print money and



inflate their way out of the crisis - not a solution open to Greece's leaders owing to the country's membership of the Euro zone.

The measures proposed include a rise in the retirement age, slashing of state bonuses and controls to diminish tax evasion together with higher taxes on fuel, tobacco and alcohol. However, any austerity measures will have to be forced through in a country with a population already verging on open revolt. A shock doctrine approach isn't going to catch the Greeks by surprise. So far the government has floundered and attempted to pin the blame elsewhere, with deputy Prime Minister Theodoros Pangalos excusing Greece's cooking of the books to join the Euro in the first place by saying, "It is what everybody did and Greece did it to a lesser extent than Italy". He then went one better and blamed Greece's economic woes on the theft of bullion by the Third Reich in 1944. Ah the old classic "Nazi Gold" excuse - who hasn't used that to get out of tight corner?

On top of the national strike, protests hit Athens and Thessaloniki. The 7,000 strong-demonstration in Thessaloniki lasted for a few hours and went off without any clashes with police. Department stores that remained open got targeted by protesters, either by having their walls covered in graffiti or, in the



case of cosmetics chain "Hondos Centre", had rubbish scattered across the department's shop floor. The protest reached its conclusion outside the ministry with the burning of the EU flag. Only then did Greek police make an appearance, ten of them showing up, but keeping their distance.

In contrast, the protests in Athens were explosive. More than 30,000 took part in two marches, one headed up by the Greek Communist Party. This was described by a SchNEWS eyewitness as 'boring'. The other consisted of an amalgamation of libertarian communists, trotskysts and anarchists alongside striking workers from the Ministry of Economics. Particularly impressive was the mobilisation of recent immigrants to Greece, who formed their own heavily policed block.

As the second march approached parliament at around 2pm, the police attempted to split it. According to our man on the scene, "It completely kicked off - people were throwing bricks and also bread was looted from a nearby bakers handcart - which was later used as a battering ram against police lines. One thing is clear, people's hatred of the police hasn't gone anywhere since December." A few molotovs were thrown and violence continued sporadically throughout the day, with anarchists attacking banks.

The majority of protesters were disgruntled workers from the country's two largest trade unions. A faction of young protesters entered a university building. Riot police followed, even though under article 16 of the Greek constitution, no police forces are allowed to enter university grounds. They withdrew to outside the gates soon after and dealt with the youths by firing tear gas. Further clashes followed, with police firing tear gas at protesters as the march made their way through the Athens streets. Greek newspapers reported that police arrested around 30 people during the protest and 23 police officers were hospitalised.

At the moment, neither side is backing down. The government claims it is going to push forward with the cutbacks, while workers' organisations have vowed another general strike on March 15.

With Spanish trade unions also gearing up for a general strike and large scale protests in response to similar proposals for cutbacks - it looks as if the neo-liberal Europe proposed in the Lisbon Treaty might be in serious crisis.

A DIFFERENT KETTLE OF FASH

The SDL (a north of the border offshoot of the EDL) were comfortably seen off the streets of Edinburgh on Saturday, despite the usual splits over tactics from different anti-fascist groups

All in all, only around eighty of the far-right actually made it to Edinburgh - showing once again that this movement hasn't really got any strength outside England. Previous efforts by both the Scottish and Welsh Defence leagues (see SchNEWS 696, 697 & 700) have ended up in ignominious failure - with the leagues kettled into pubs besieged by anti-fascists.

In this case the Edinburgh anti-fascist alliance had a couple of months to prepare for the SDL's arrival. Unfortunately once again organising was marred by SWP front group the UAF insisting on holding a simultaneous rally two miles away from the leaguers' meeting point.

Despite this, as soon as the League were sighted in a pub near Holyrood parliament, large numbers marched to confront them. They were soon kettled inside the boozier and had to wait for police reinforcements. They were then unceremoniously bussed out of town.

Before the march, police arrested EDL leaders travelling to Edinburgh for incitement to cause a breach of the peace. According to an EDL statement, armed police raided the leaders' homes and seized computer equipment. The leaders have now been banned from attending any meeting with more than three EDL members.

The EDL are now gearing up to welcome far-right Dutch islamaphobe Geert Wilder to Britain. They will be gathering outside the Houses of Parliament on March 5. Contrary to rumours, the planned march through Bradford in May is still scheduled according to the EDL website.

POLITICAL CLIMATE

Politics and internal power dynamics were top of the agenda for the national gathering of the Camp for Climate Action last weekend (19th - 21st).

About 100 activists representing different regional groups arrived in Bristol to discuss how to harmonise the movement's disparate political beliefs and work towards a clear objective. Everyone agreed on the principles of a non-hierarchical organisation and that market based solutions to climate change, like those put forward by world powers at Copenhagen, were not the answer. A commitment to fighting the economic system that puts corporate interests before those of the people was also agreed to be a key stance.

Once people had exorcised their political demons, talk turned towards the next steps for the collective, resulting in consensus that regional and local control of the movement should be at the heart of Climate Camp, with more autonomy and decision making at local level, including the planning of direct action. The general election was discussed as the next big thing for the camp to focus on - but rather than action organised centrally, it should be the local groups that find their own way to make their diverse opinions heard.

Those involved came away feeling it had been a positive and productive meet, with renewed enthusiasm for action at grass roots level - which a movement like this should really be about. Local meetings are being held in March, to find your nearest group, see www.climatecamp.org.uk

COLOMBIA: STRUCK OIL

A month-long protest against BP contractors in Colombia erupted in violence last week as riot police attacked striking workers and locals.

The workers, striking for better pay and conditions, had been set to hold talks with employers on 16th February. But on the 15th police moved in, breaking up the protest by beating workers with batons and riot shields and firing tear gas canisters, with scant regard for children making their way to school.

BP has been operating in the oil producing region of Casanare for more than 20 years. Until last year, the workers had no union, and right-wing paramilitary groups operating in the area imposed labour conditions and crushed dissent. Campesino and community leaders in the region that challenged that order were assassinated.

However, in 2009 the Oil Workers Union managed to establish a branch in Tauramena, where oil company OCEMSA operate. OCEMSA is owned by BP, Total and the Colombian state-owned Ecopetrol. The union has spent the last year supporting workers and the community in campaigns for better conditions - not easy work in the country where more union leaders are assassinated annually than in the rest of the world combined.

The British Colombia Solidarity Campaign is now planning action to hold BP accountable for the human rights abuses going on for the benefit of its profits. There will be a protest at 4pm this afternoon (26th) outside BP's London HQ in St James's Square. The campaign will be planning further solidarity action at its annual meeting in London tomorrow (27th). The group is also urging people to tell BP what they think of their company by emailing Executive Director and Group Chief Executive Tony Hayward at : tony.hayward@bp.com and to send their support to the workers at usopaz@yahoo.com

*see www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk

*<http://sussexcolombiasolidarity.wordpress.com/>

TITNORE: BARKING MAD

A Titnore Woods welcoming committee was sent to greet a Tesco opening in Durrington on Thursday (25th). Camp Titnore carried banners inscribed with "Smash Tesco-Save Titnore" and "Titnore Radio 101.6fm". Three people tried to lock on outside the shop's main entrance. Security quickly dragged two people off but one protester successfully managed to attach himself. Security lackeys were on him straight away with bolt croppers, cutting him loose, but not before mildly strangling him. Police arrived on the scene, threatening everyone with arrest unless they dispersed. Protesters then held a picket line by the Tesco roundabout. There were two arrests for aggravated trespass - one for helping their friend while police violently dragged him away, another when he started screaming after security assaulted him for holding a banner. Both were released and bailed till 17th March - two days after the Council's meeting deciding Titnore's future - 15th

A march has been scheduled for 2pm in the Assembly Hall, Worthing.

*see www.protectourwoodland.co.uk

PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see
www.schnews.org.uk/pap

INSIDE SCHNEWS

Six more defendants in the Gaza protests trials (see SchNEWS 711) were sentenced at Isleworth Crown Court last Friday, all for violent disorder. Those under 18 at the time received sentences ranging from 8 months to a year while the adults received between one and two years. One defendant got a suspended sentence due to a history of mental illness.

An emergency protest has been called for today, at 9.30am at Isleworth Crown Court. There will be a public meeting on the jailing of the Gaza protesters next Tuesday (2nd) Committee room 19, House of Commons (St Stephens entrance)

*For addresses to send letters of support see www.nomoreisolation.wordpress.com/what-you-can-do/

WHEN HUNGER STRIKES

The hunger strike at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre has carried on into its 3rd week as 20 female detainees continue to refuse food (See SchNEWS 710). Four of the strikers remain in HMP Holloway prison, held without charge. Solidarity demos outside Serco's head office and at HMP Holloway have taken place this week, as well as a 2 day hunger strike in Bradford and a 24hr fast by No Borders activists. More action is planned for outside the Serco offices today (26th).

*<https://publish.indymedia.org.uk/en/2010/02/446439.html>

RA RA RUSH-PUTIN

On Tuesday (23rd) Russian anarchists celebrated a national holiday in their own inimitable way by targeting a military HQ in Moscow. Around 30 activists marched through the streets before lobbing bottles and lightbulbs filled with red paint at the building and spraying slogans on the walls.

'Defender of the Motherland Day' is dedicated to people from the armed forces, the date is also connected with the violent deportation of Chechens and Ingushs to Central Asia in 1944.

Protesters scattered as a police car drove by, leaving a (pseudo) blood spattered military commandment's office behind them. All told a ballsy act in Putin's Russia...

*see www.avtonom.org/en/node/8687

*The Belarusian capital Minsk also saw some anarchic action, with demonstrators congregating to protest against the planned building of a new nuclear power plant.

...and finally...

Scientists have come out with a report that appears to dispel the myth that we are all unique individuals. The data, gathered from mobile phones, suggests that 93% of all human behaviour is predictable.

Here at SchNEWS we debate these findings. Sure, 93% of the time we spend our weeks in a cramped, dirty office coming up with inexplicable punning headlines and churning out witty reports of the latest direct action. But, we only get the date wrong 10% of the time, make spellign errors 33% of the time and use, bad, punctuation:- 45% of the time. Only 25% of the time are our facts wrong (although according to other sources its 49%) and only 12% of the time we misquote sources. Only 57% of the time do we labour a point and bleed jokes dry...

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers, beware of Greeks bearing molotovs. Honest.

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